

STRESS

DEFINITION

Stress is internal or external pressure that creates feelings of conflict and/or anxiety within an individual. Stress can stem from demands one places on oneself or from outside stimuli or situations. Some stress is easily identified, such as increased financial responsibilities; while other stress, such as feeling that one must earn peer acceptance, may go undetected. If stress is not identified and resolved, it can progressively deteriorate one's ability to function.

CAUSES / EFFECTS

Stress is most frequently caused by change, such as personal loss of a loved one; job advancement or career change; illness or injury; life-style changes, such as pregnancy; increased responsibilities; or altered family roles. Some personalities are more prone to stress because of poor coping skills or unhealthy mental attitudes toward life and/or self. Some stress is positive and creates diversity and challenges in life. Positive stress can keep motivation and creative responses at their highest levels. Positive stress can also protect one from a threatening situation.

Persistent stress or "distress" results in debilitating anxiety that affects one's overall mental, emotional and physical health. Immediate dizziness, pounding heart, abnormal eating habits, troubled breathing, inability to slow down or relax and many other physical symptoms may occur as a result of stress. Unresolved stress or too much stress placed on oneself can create or aggravate a number of psychiatric and physical ailments such as depression, ulcers, high blood pressure, phobias, disturbed sleep patterns, tension headaches, and anxiety.

STRESS-COPING SKILLS

With proper coping skills, stress can be managed. Skills may include:

- **Good health habits.** Get a balanced diet and plenty of rest; avoid too much caffeine, alcohol and cigarette smoking. A healthy body tolerates stress efficiently, with less tendency to develop stress-related diseases.
- **Regular exercise.** Physical activities often relieve the body of unnecessary tensions and allow the body to function more effectively. Exercise also provides needed diversions from life's pressures.
- **Structured planning of daily activities.** By properly planning and using one's time, daily demands can be handled before they create unhealthy stress. Daily planning provides for a varied schedule, which can include work, leisure, social and family activities, as well as personal time.
- **Setting realistic goals.** People who expect too much of themselves are more frequently troubled by stress. Goals must be realistic to be motivational.
- **Learning to relax.** Just a few minutes of peace and quiet each day gives one the ability to properly assess a challenging situation and to respond in an appropriate manner.
- **Talking about stress.** Opening up about problems or tensions with close friends, a therapist, co-workers, a clergy member or the people involved in a stressful situation allows for sharing of feelings and an opportunity to keep potential stressors in proper perspective.

For further information, please call **1-800-6738 9595**. We offer confidential assessments at no cost or obligation.



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